

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTES**

	X
KWABENA BOATENG,	:
	:
Plaintiff,	:
	:
v.	Case No.
	:
AMAZON.COM, INC.,	JURY TRIAL DEMANDED
	:
Defendant.	:
	:

COMPLAINT

Kwabena Boateng (“Kwabena”), by and through his attorney, hereby brings this civil rights complaint against Defendant Amazon.com, Inc. (“Amazon”) for discrimination and retaliation in violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, 42 U.S.C. § 1981 (“Section 1981”) and the Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act, G.L. c. 151B § 4, *et seq.*

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Kwabena, an accomplished technology and safety professional from Ghana, joined Amazon on March 1, 2021, as the Head of Control Systems, Safety, and Regulatory Compliance. In this role, he was responsible for ensuring functional safety and regulatory compliance of Amazon’s hardware products, including the design and maintenance of automation and control platforms across Amazon Robotics Solutions. Kwabena excelled in this position and his outstanding contributions earned him a spot in Amazon Fulfillment Technologies & Robotics’ Black Leadership Program (“BLP”) in less than two years with Amazon. This leadership development program grew out of Amazon’s efforts to raise the number of Black people holding positions at the Director and above level—only 8.3% in 2020—by offering targeted and

specialized training to program participants.¹ Kwabena graduated from the program in September 2023.

Yet despite Kwabena’s exemplary performance and Amazon’s purported commitment to increasing opportunities for its Black employees, he soon found himself in trouble for simply doing his job by reporting an urgent safety threat concerning Amazon employees who were on an Amazon-sponsored trip in Ghana during a time of civil unrest in that country. While Kwabena attempted to respond to the unfolding unrest in Ghana, he was denied access to an Amazon fulfillment center until a white colleague could “vouch” for him. Kwabena reported this discrimination to Amazon but instead of appropriately addressing his allegations, Amazon retaliated by instead investigating Kwabena and suspending him for the duration of the investigation.

Two months later, Amazon closed its investigation of Kwabena and claimed it had found him in violation of Amazon policies. But Amazon did not disclose any detailed information supporting their finding of supposed violations nor did they mandate any corrective actions for Kwabena. A few weeks later, after his suspension should have been lifted because Amazon ended its investigation, Kwabena attended AWS re:Invent, a week-long conference where attendees, including developers, IT professionals, and industry leaders, come together to learn, connect, and discover the latest innovations in cloud technologies. Although he successfully registered and attended the first day of the conference without issue, when Amazon’s senior leadership learned of his presence, they directed their security team to remove him from the venue, publicly humiliating him in front of colleagues, friends, and attendees. Even worse, Amazon refused to reimburse him for the \$2,000 registration fee he lost and then summarily

¹ Lucas Manfredi, *Amazon to double company's Black leadership over next two years, ensure “inclusive language in software coding”*, FOX BUSINESS (Nov. 3, 2020), <https://www.foxbusiness.com/business-leaders/amazon-to-double-companys-black-leadership-over-next-two-years-ensure-inclusive-language-in-software-coding>.

fired him.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

1. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1333 as this action involves federal questions regarding the deprivation of Kwabena's rights under federal law. This Court has supplemental jurisdiction over Kwabena's related state law claims pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1337(a).

2. Venue is proper under 28 U.S.C. § 1333(b) because a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to this action, including the unlawful employment practices alleged herein, occurred in this District.

PARTIES

3. Plaintiff Kwabena Boateng is a resident of Worcester County, Massachusetts. During the relevant time period, he was an employee of Defendant and worked at the Amazon Fulfillment Office in Westborough, Massachusetts.

4. Defendant Amazon.com, Inc. is a corporation organized under the laws of the State of Delaware with a principal place of business and corporate headquarters in Seattle, Washington. Defendant operates its services through fulfillment centers and offices nationwide, including in Massachusetts.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

I. Amazon's history of ignoring worker safety and retaliating against Black employees who suffer discrimination at Amazon

5. In 2024, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions published an investigation that detailed how Amazon sacrificed worker safety in its quest to

maximize productivity and ultimately, profit.²

6. In 2021, Vox.com, a technology news website, conducted an in-depth investigation into five separate lawsuits filed that year against Amazon by women of color, alleging racial discrimination and retaliation against current and former Amazon employees.³ In its investigation, Vox.com interviewed more than 30 current and former Amazon employees and uncovered employees across the company who had experiences similar to those mentioned in the lawsuits.⁴

II. Amazon dismisses Kwabena's reports of potential security concerns for employees visiting Ghana and punishes him for doing his job

5. Kwabena began working at Amazon on March 1, 2021, as the Head of Control Systems, Safety and Regulatory Compliance. He excelled in his role and was chosen for Amazon's prestigious Black Leadership Program.

6. The BLP is a leadership development program offering targeted and specialized training designed to increase the number of Black people holding positions at the Director and above level. Kwabena completed the program and graduated in September 2023.

7. Only a week later, Kwabena was humiliated simply for performing his job. On September 26, 2023, Kwabena went to the Amazon Fulfillment Center (GEG1) in Spokane, WA as part of his regular duties. During the trip, Kwabena learned of a growing civil uprising to overthrow the government of Ghana. Because of the potential for violence, Kwabena grew increasingly concerned about the safety and security of the U.S.-based Amazon employees then-

² Chris Isidore, *Senate Report Accuses Amazon of Ignoring Worker Safety in Productivity Push*, CNN (Dec. 16, 2024), <https://www.cnn.com/2024/12/16/business/amazon-worker-safety-senate-report/index.html>; Noam Scheiber, *Amazon Disregarded Internal Warnings on Injuries, Senate Investigation Claims*, NEW YORK TIMES (Dec. 16, 2024), <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/16/business/economy/amazon-warehouse-injuries.html>.

³ Jason Del Rey, *Amazon's Black Employees Say the Company's HR Department is Failing Them*, VOX (Jun. 15, 2021), <https://www.vox.com/recode/22524538/amazon-diversity-black-employees-human-resources-department>.

⁴ *Id.*

visiting Ghana. In response to this emerging threat, Kwabena quickly headed to the fulfillment center to notify corporate security to invoke its oversight and incident command responses.

8. When Kwabena arrived at the fulfillment center, however, Amazon security treated him as a threat, denied him entry into the building, and initially refused to file a security report regarding the incident. Kwabena was only later able to gain access to the fulfillment center, on a temporary day pass, after contacting a white colleague, Justin Croyle, who then spoke to Amazon security and “vouched” for Kwabena. During the incident at the fulfillment center, Kwabena reported the discrimination to Amazon’s human resources department and requested an investigation into the delay in filing a security report.

9. Later that week, on September 29, 2023, Kwabena concluded his travel to Washington and returned to his assigned Amazon office (BOS27) located in Westborough, MA. Despite experiencing dismissive and discriminatory behavior from his Amazon colleagues, Kwabena continued to perform his duties and excel in his role. He also emailed Amazon’s Senior Leadership team of Kevin Trenholme, Parris Wellman, Scott Dresser, Joe Quinlivian, John Felton, and Andy Jassy to propose revisions to Amazon’s internal safety certification protocols.

10. That same day, Mr. Trenholme called him to advise that Andy Jassy was visiting the BOS27 facility. Mr. Trenholme also expressed that Mr. Quinlivian felt “blindsided” by Kwabena’s email. Kwabena then offered to brief Mr. Quinlivian ahead of the meeting with Mr. Jassy.

11. Later that day, Kwabena arrived at the office and spoke with Mr. Wellman, who informed Kwabena that he already briefed Mr. Quinlivian and that Mr. Wellman knew Kwabena had “good intentions” when sending his email. However, later that day, Mr. Wellman and Mahwish Qamar (“Ms. Qamar”), an HR representative, suggested that Kwabena “take a break” and work from home. Kwabena was confused about the interaction and mistakenly assumed that

working from home was optional rather than a directive. As Kwabena was returning to his office, he encountered Mr. Dresser and took the opportunity to clarify his email to the leadership team. Mr. Dresser responded that it was not an issue, and they parted amicably.

12. Later that same afternoon, after discovering that Kwabena had spoken with Mr. Dresser, Mr. Wellman angrily confronted Kwabena and abruptly initiated a disciplinary meeting. During the meeting, Mr. Wellman accused him of “acting out of character” and demanded that he leave the premises immediately. Kwabena complied with this demand, ordered an Uber to take him home, and quietly waited in the lobby of the building for his Uber to arrive. Before it could arrive, Amazon security confiscated his badge and made him leave the building, publicly humiliating him in front of his colleagues. Kwabena subsequently filed a complaint against Mr. Wellman, and Amazon assured him that an investigation would take place. But Amazon never disclosed any findings of its investigation of Mr. Wellman to Kwabena.

13. On September 30, 2023, Kwabena discovered that his access to the Amazon employee portal had been revoked, which cut off his ability to access work emails and critical employee resources. Frustrated and concerned, he reached out to Ms. Qamar and Kate Harvey, Director of Human Resources for an explanation. But neither Ms. Harvey nor Ms. Qamar offered any explanation nor did they inform him that his direct reports had been instructed not to communicate with him.

III. Amazon does not respond to Kwabena’s discrimination complaints and instead fires him

14. On October 2, 2023, Kwabena sent a follow-up email to Ms. Harvey, expressing frustration over the lack of communication and transparency regarding his job status. In response, Ms. Harvey claimed that an investigation was underway into his conduct at the fulfillment center but did not provide any clarification as to his job status. She also advised him

not to visit any Amazon locations while the investigation was pending and that Carrie Kemmerer, an investigator, would contact him with more information.

15. Over the next two months, Kwabena maintained contact with Amazon HR, expressing his deep disappointment to Ms. Qamar and stating that Amazon had “broken his trust” through their treatment of him. He also communicated that Amazon’s actions against him felt personal, indicating Senior Leadership’s intention to punish him for making protected complaints. In response, Ms. Qamar retaliated by falsely reporting to the Bedford Police Department that Kwabena had threatened her. This unfounded allegation prompted the Bedford police to involve both the Westborough Police Department and the FBI, leading to both agencies visiting his home to question him in his absence, which traumatized his wife and young children.

16. On October 11, 2023, in a final plea for help, Kwabena emailed Amazon CEO Andy Jassy, expressing deep frustration over his treatment by Amazon. In his email, he highlighted an incident involving his supervisor, Mr. Wellman, who had pressured Kwabena to conduct a safety review of a company on whose board Mr. Wellman served. Mr. Wellman sought to have this company integrated into Amazon Fulfillment Centers, but after Kwabena determined that the company did not meet necessary safety requirements, Mr. Wellman’s hostility toward Kwabena increased.

17. On October 19, 2023, Kwabena received a letter notifying him that Amazon was suspending his employment during its investigation. The letter also indicated that Amazon would look into the incidents at the Washington and Massachusetts fulfillment centers, as well as Kwabena’s discrimination allegations.

18. On November 28, 2023, Amazon notified Kwabena that its investigation was closed and he was found in violation of Amazon’s policies and standards of conduct. No investigation details were provided to Kwabena, nor was he told to take any corrective actions,

and there was no follow-up to his discrimination complaints.

19. On December 5, 2023, Kwabena attended the AWS Re:Invent event hosted by Amazon to represent his nonprofit, African Diaspora Nation. Amazon failed to inform Kwabena that he was not welcome at this public event, and he was even allowed to register and attend the event's first day. Despite this, Amazon security publicly removed Kwabena from the event on the second day, humiliating him in front of his colleagues and friends, and failing to treat him with the humanity and dignity he deserved.

20. On December 18, 2023, Amazon terminated Kwabena, effective immediately, citing violations of its corporate policy.

21. Due to his termination from Amazon, Kwabena has faced significant losses, such as the loss of his salary, unreimbursed expenses from company business, and other employee benefits. His professional reputation has been severely damaged both internally and externally. Furthermore, Kwabena has experienced long-term mental health challenges due to his poor treatment by Amazon, including panic attacks.

COUNT I
VIOLATIONS OF SECTION 1981 - 42 U.S.C. § 1981

22. Kwabena hereby repeats, reiterates and re-alleges each and every allegation as contained in each of the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

23. Kwabena is a member of a protected class on the basis of race. He is a Black man from Ghana.

24. Kwabena, in all respects, was performing his job in a manner that was consistent with Amazon's legitimate business expectations.

25. Amazon discriminated against Kwabena as described above, including but not limited to, harassing him, subjecting him to a hostile work environment, and firing him.

26. Amazon also retaliated against Kwabena as described above.

27. As a direct and proximate result of Amazon's unlawful employment practices, Kwabena has suffered, and continues to suffer, monetary and/or economic harm for which he is entitled to an award of damages, in addition to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.

28. As a direct and proximate result of Amazon's unlawful employment practices, Kwabena has suffered, and continues to suffer, humiliation, mental anguish, and emotional distress for which he is entitled to an award of compensatory damages and other relief.

COUNT II
VIOLATIONS OF THE MASSACHUSETTS FAIR EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES ACT -
G.L. c. 151B § 4

29. Kwabena hereby repeats, reiterates and re-alleges each and every allegation as contained in each of the preceding paragraphs as if fully set forth herein.

30. By the acts described above, Amazon discriminated against Kwabena based on his race and national origin.

31. Amazon also retaliated against Kwabena for his protected complaints about discrimination.

32. As a direct and proximate result of Amazon's unlawful employment practices, Kwabena has suffered, and continues to suffer, monetary and/or economic harm for which he is entitled to an award of damages, in addition to reasonable attorneys' fees and costs.

33. As a direct and proximate result of Amazon's unlawful employment practices, Kwabena has suffered, and continues to suffer, mental anguish and emotional distress for which he is entitled to an award of compensatory damages and other relief.

34. Amazon's conduct was willful and/or showed reckless disregard for Kwabena's statutorily protected rights.

PRAYER FOR RELIEF

WHEREFORE, Kwabena prays that the Court:

- A. Enter judgment in his favor and against Amazon for violation of his rights under Section 1981 and the Massachusetts Fair Employment Practices Act;
- B. Declare that the actions of Amazon constituted unlawful discrimination;
- C. Award him compensatory damages, including, but not limited to, lost wages and benefits, in such amount as will reasonably compensate him for his losses, and damages for emotional distress;
- D. Award him punitive damages in such amount as the Court deems proper;
- E. Award him his costs, attorneys' fees, and non-taxable expenses in this action; and
- F. Grant him such other and further relief as the Court deems equitable and just.

JURY DEMAND

Plaintiff hereby demands a trial by jury pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 38(b) on all issues so triable.

Dated: July 3, 2025

Respectfully submitted,

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